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ABSTRACT

This study examined the unique patterns of integration into U.S. culture of four Asian Indian families, noting how these patterns shaped the identities and experiences of children within the families. Families from a local Asian Indian cultural organization agreed to participate. Parents and children completed open-ended, semi-structured interviews. Data analysis indicated that the four families were very diverse in their cultural adaptation patterns, which challenges educators' stereotypes of Asian Indian student. Most parents agreed that providing exposure to Indian culture at home was important in helping children get in touch with their Indian selves, though some parents were more enthusiastic than others about ensuring that their children learned their religious customs and cultural traditions. Parents differed in their views about the importance of maintaining or learning the native language. Most of the children tried to fit into both cultures, experiencing discontinuity when they left home to enter school, where there were few opportunities to express their cultural and ethnic identity. Some parents implied that teachers and principals needed to understand the beliefs and value systems of newer immigrants, noting the lack of awareness of most Americans about Asian Indians and India. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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"Partly Indian, Partly American": Social and Cultural Integration of Asian Indian Parents and Children in the United States

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"Partly Indian, Partly American": Social and Cultural Integration of Asian Indian Parents and Children in the United States

> "The less a person understands another, the greater is his urge to classify him – in terms of nationality, religion, occupation or psychiatric status... In short, classifying another person renders intimate acquaintance with him quite unnecessary and impossible" (Szasz, 1976, p. 46).

The increasing trend of immigration is changing the composition of classrooms in the US and is unfolding new concerns for teachers, administrators, policy-makers, and researchers. Asian Indians[1] (people of Indian origin, who migrated from India) are emerging as a distinct ethnic minority group in the US with a large proportion of highly educated and professional immigrant families. However, not many studies have been conducted to understand the complex patterns of integration of these families in the larger cultural context of US.

My study is an attempt to understand in-depth the lives of four families – parents who migrated from India in search of better educational and professional opportunities, and ended up making a home for themselves and their future generations in US. It is a journey into their experiences as immigrants and experiences as parents, trying to create the best possible life for their children and themselves. Children in these families are undertaking a journey of their own in search of their identities – not just as children growing up to be adults, but as children of their parents who migrated from India, not just with material possessions, but also with a big bag of cultural, emotional and psychological possessions.

Research Problem and Significance

Effective schooling requires continuity between home and school environments. In the case of families with diverse cultural, economic and linguistic backgrounds, significant discontinuities exist between home and school (Ogbu, 1982). Lightfoot (1978) remarks that "greater the difference between family and community culture and school

[1] Since most immigrants from India like to identify themselves as Indians instead of Asian Indians, throughout this paper the word "Indian" has been used interchangeably with "Asian Indians."

norms, the greater the need for parents and teachers to work hard at knowing one another" (p. 189). The continuing challenge is to understand families in their diversity and complexity, and my in-depth study with selected Asian Indians families is a step in that direction.

There is a persuasive volume of research on education of minorities, which aims at understanding the patterns of achievement of different minority groups, and also attempts to provide different explanations for those patterns. Heredity, cultural deprivation (cultural advantage, as a corollary to this), cultural conflict (or compatibility) with mainstream culture, structural inequities in school and society, and minority perceptions of opportunities available to them within a stratified society are some of the most important theories furnished by different researchers and scholars to explain the variation in minority achievement (Lee, 1991).

In order to understand and interpret the variability in school performance of children from different minority groups, many educational anthropologists use the concept of cultural model. These cultural models frame people's experiences, supply interpretations of those experiences, and also provide goals for action. Quinn and Holland (1987) define cultural models as "presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (though not necessarily to the exclusion of others) by the members of a society that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it." (p. 4). In a pluralistic society such as the US, different groups of people tend to have different understandings of how their society or any particular institution in the society works, and also of their places in that working order (Ogbu, 1991). These understandings result in different cultural models for people of different ethnic, social, and cultural groups.

In the world of schooling, multiple cultural models coexist with one another. People in a particular segment of the society interpret educational events, situations, and experiences, and also behave accordingly through the framework of their cultural models of schooling. Ogbu (1991) contends that since different cultural models provoke different behaviors, the cultural model of a particular group is connected to some degree with the relative academic success or academic failure of its members. Parents' attitudes, expectations, and involvement in their children's education are important aspects of their

cultural model of schooling. In a particular ethnic or cultural group, parents' belief systems about their children's education are shaped by the group's cultural values and orientation toward education in general, and also by parents' individual patterns of incorporation into the dominant culture (Ogbu, 1991).

The Asian Indian cultural model of schooling must be understood in the broader picture of social, economic, and cultural context of families and their experiences as immigrants, raising children in a culture very different from the one they were raised in. This qualitative study, which is part of a larger study on Asian Indian cultural model of schooling, provides an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural aspects of the lives of parents and children in four Asian Indian families in a midwestern university town. The purpose is to understand the bi-cultural lives of these four families and see their world through their eyes as well as mine.

This paper examines the unique and distinct patterns of integration of four Asian Indian families into the dominant American culture, and the ways in which these patterns shape the identities and experiences of children in these families. Western psychological and sociological theories do not necessarily depict the educational and attitudinal constructs of people from other cultures of the world, as they might be operationalized if an emic approach is adopted for each culturally and ethnically diverse group (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993). This study adds to the growing database of contextualized research with culturally and linguistically diverse families in the US. An in-depth study of the ways in which parents and children in a specific immigrant minority group make sense of their bi-cultural identities and experiences not only helps bring the "worlds apart" (Lightfoot, 1978) of home and school closer, but also has important implications for teaching practice, policy-making and school administration in order to make the schooling process more meaningful and effective for various ethnic minorities in the U.S.

Research Design and Methodology

Gibson's (1988) ethnography of Punjabi Sikhs in rural California is the only major study that explores the Asian Indian cultural model of schooling. However, the specific nature and characteristics of the research setting and research participants make my study highly different in nature, design, methodology, and findings from Gibson's

study. Her findings are highly contextualized in the peculiar characteristics of her research setting (rural California) and its participants (less-educated, agriculture being the primary occupation). I conducted the present study in a midwestern university town with most of the participants being highly educated and involved in professional concerns such as academe, medicine and corporate sector. In this way, I extend Gibson's study to a different context, time, and place. Instead of doing an ethnography of a particular community, I used a collective case study approach (Stake, 1995) to study four Asian Indian families. The presence of a lone researcher and the constraints of time and resources led me to define the focus of my study more narrowly than the one in Gibson's ethnography. I placed a greater emphasis on understanding the uniqueness of Asian Indian families' patterns of integration, rather than employing a comparative approach as used by Gibson.

Gaining access to the families was the most critical and significant task in implementing this study. Building a rapport with the research participants and gaining their trust was imperative to the research design. Voluntary consent was asked from all the participants in the study with an assurance of their rights to privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. An active consent letter explaining the purposes and procedures of the study was sent to parents and they were asked to give their written consent if they wanted to participate in the project. All were given pseudonyms to assure anonymity. Though I wanted the pseudonyms to be Indian, I attempted to conceal the regional identity of the research participants by choosing more general and common Indian names.

Only those details about the families and the research setting that have a bearing on the study are included in the written report. Some of the information gathered through these open-ended interviews and conversations was of such a personal nature and so sensitive that after serious reflection on my part and discussion with colleagues, I decided not to include this information in the study. In view of the small size of the Asian Indian community in the town where the study was conducted, making such information public could lead to some gossip or rumors about the person(s) concerned, and in the worst case reveal the identity of the research participants.

Being from India and having lived in the town for more than three years at the time of conducting this study, I had an additional advantage of being an insider to the

Asian Indian community. My identity influenced not only the choice of the research problem and the sample selection process, but also the collection and analysis of data.

Sample Selection Process

The context of the research setting strongly determined the selection of families to be studied. In order to select the sample for the study, preliminary contacts were made with eight Asian Indian families by telephone. I acquired their phone numbers from the directory of a local Asian Indian cultural organization. The families were debriefed about the purposes and procedures of the project. They were also told to call me with any questions or doubts they might have in regard to their involvement in the project. These families were contacted again after three weeks to ask if they were interested in participating in this project.

Purposive sampling was employed to include two types of families – one in which at least one parent was affiliated with the university, and the second in which neither parent was directly associated with the university. In almost all the families initially contacted, I found both or at least one parent to be college educated with some experience with the higher education system in the U.S. However, in order to understand the diversity and complexity that exists in a particular ethnic minority group, I selected families which varied on other selection criteria, including the ages of children, the language spoken at home, whether or not the mother was working or at-home, and the number of years families had been in the U.S.

Through this process, I identified four Asian Indian families who provided me with verbal and written consent confirming their willingness to participate in this research project. In one particular family, parents organize native language instruction in their "Sunday home-school" for a group of Asian Indian children. Inclusion of this case in the study provides deeper and richer insights into these particular parents' attitudes toward and involvement in their children's education, and their emphasis on maintenance of native language. Nonetheless, each family's individual background, history, traditions, and attitudes toward living and raising a family in U.S., combined with the overall social and cultural context of the research setting has contributed to the richness and depth of the issues under study. More details about these four families are provided later.

First Contact with the Research Participants

After a series of telephone conversations with parents in the four selected families, and after they had agreed to participate in the research, I decided to invite each of the four families for dinner at my home in order to have a general discussion about my research. This also gave them an opportunity to revisit and raise any concerns they had about the study and their participation in it. My insider identity as an Asian Indian was a driving force behind my decision to invite the research participants to my home. Since food is an important aspect of social gatherings in almost all Indian homes, I decided that inviting my research participants for a casual meal at my apartment and chit-chat would be the best way to make them feel comfortable with me, and would also give me an opportunity to know them a little bit in an informal setting before I began the formal interviews for my data collection. Keeping the issues of confidentiality and anonymity paramount, the four families were invited on different days to avoid their meeting each other and more importantly to allow me to spend time with them as a family. Only in one instance was the father in one family unable to come because of a work commitment. Overall, these icebreaker dinner parties proved to be very useful in building a rapport with the parents and children alike; in one case it provided an occasion for the daughter in one family to provide important information about her attempts to explore her Indian self.

Data Collection Techniques

I interviewed the parents and children in these families over a period of eight months. These interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, and questions emerged mainly from at the time of the interviews. However, based upon my readings in the areas of immigrant experience and particularly Asian Indian experience, I had prepared a general interview guide to direct me in my interviews with the families. This guide was helpful in keeping the inquiry focused on the research questions, though I did collect enough information related to the broader context in which my research participants live. On many occasions the interview took such an informal and personal nature that I did not feel it was appropriate to follow the interview guide; in these instances, I let the conversation flow naturally.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the homes of the research participants. This provided me with an opportunity to observe the socialization and interaction patterns in these families and to collect first-hand information on parents' and children's lifestyles. Some of the interviews were also conducted at my home, and the children's schools depending upon the convenience of these places for parents and children. Casual conversations with the research participants over telephone and at local community events provided additional information. Multiple observations and interviews were helpful in triangulating the data.

Since the study required interviewing parents and children who were minors, I also submitted the required application forms for the Human Participants Review Committee at the university. The project was reviewed by the committee, and was found to meet the requirements for the ethical treatment of human subjects according to the Belmont Principles and the policies and procedures set forth in the university's Institutional Review Board's Handbook for Investigators.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative study is concomitant with data collection, that is, preliminary interpretation began while the data was being collected through interviews and observations. However, it was important to delve deep into the qualitative data, and to look for the emerging issues and themes from the numerous interview transcripts and fieldnotes. This also enabled me to look beyond the most immediate interpretation that came to mind, and to search for the deeper meaning behind a phenomenon observed or a statement heard.

The data analysis was inductive and holistic in nature, aimed at seeking the general issues emerging from the intersection of the experiences of these four families. The data was coded and compiled into relevant categories for organization and interpretation. These categories emerged from many sessions of careful examination and scrutiny of the transcribed data. The interpretations were based on my understanding of the worlds of my research participants as they described those to me, and as seen through my eyes as an Asian Indian researcher.

The researchers working in the naturalist paradigm believe that there is no single, objective reality "out there," and that people perceive and construct their own realities based upon their experiences and understanding of the world around them (Lincoln and Guba,1985). Qualitative researchers attempt to capture the world of their research participants by understanding their perceived realities and interpreting that from their own subjective perspectives as researchers and individuals. Krieger (1991) believes that the outer world, or our "external reality" is inseparable from what we already know based on our lives and experiences, which construct our inner reality. In exploring the worlds of my research participants, I realized I was working with their constructions of the reality of their lives as immigrants, parents, and children. As I tried to look for patterns and themes in the data, my personal construction of the reality of my world as an Asian Indian, and as a potential immigrant often surfaced and interacted with the constructed realities of my research participants. I monitored my subjectivity by recording my reactions and opinions in a journal as I went about the data analysis, but at the same time allowed for an inter-subjective interpretation of the data. The subjective and constructed realities of my research participants and mine, and the interactions among different interpretations of these realities are the foundation of this study.

Establishing Trustworthiness

The length of the time spent on the research setting, doing observations, and conducting interviews was an important factor in establishing a trusting relationship between the research participants and me. This determined, to a large extent, the reliability and trustworthiness of the information gathered from the participants. Triangulation techniques were employed to validate the findings. Observations, interviews, and casual conversations were used to triangulate the data. I also maintained a research log where I kept a record of the interview and observation schedules. I also maintained a subjectivity journal through which I regularly evaluated my bias in seeing and interpreting things and people in and around the research setting.

Regular discussions of portions of data with colleagues were important for additional analysis and interpretation and also for checking of my perceptions of the reality. This method of peer-debriefing also served as a tool for triangulating the findings.

I also shared the interpretive process with research participants, by obtaining their reactions to the working drafts of the interview transcripts and fieldnotes, and also by sharing with them the progress of study. Through this, I was also able to verify whether or not I was reflecting the insider's perspectives. This also helped me in developing new ideas and interpretations of the phenomena around the research participants and me. The participants were also able to make me aware of the sections of the data that, if made public, could have been problematic for either personal or political reasons. Such information was not included in the final report, and the research participants were assured that I would have the only access to interview tapes and transcripts.

"Part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 147). As a qualitative researcher, in this paper I have detailed the particular circumstances and the context of the study, and have discussed what documents or people or places were unavailable to me for the study. I have also described the unique characteristics of the research setting and the research participants that illustrated the issues under study in some lights but not in others. I do not make any generalizations about the findings of the study, but provide adequate information about the cases, and the issues emerging from the interpretation of the cases for the readers to make their own naturalistic generalizations about the phenomena.

Presentation of the Results and Findings

The nature and methodology of the project demand a narrative style of writing. Each case is described in sufficient detail, highlighting parents' and children's experiences as first- and second-generation immigrants. I have described each case in sufficient detail to enable the readers to understand its complexity and uniqueness, the emphasis is on probing into the similarities and differences in each of these cases to understand the intricate, deep, unique, and also the universal nature of cultural model of schooling in these families.

Instead of providing information on each of the four families individually, I have used a thematic approach to bring out the similarities and differences in the perceptions and experiences of my research participants. Direct quotes from interviews are liberally used to give voice to the research participants. I have performed the role of a storyteller

through a descriptive and narrative style of writing, providing rich background information on the lives of my research participants.

The interpretation of the data collected is presented within the text of the lives of the research participants. These interpretations are largely grounded in the views expressed by the research participants, and my role as a researcher has been to provide an additional layer of interpretation of those perspectives. My interactions with the participants and their lives are also embedded within the narrative at certain occasions. This enables the readers to understand how my identity as an Asian Indian researcher shaped the nature of the research design, including the questions asked, the answers generated, and the interpretations constructed. This issue of positionality of a researcher is introduced below and discussed in length elsewhere (Mehra, 2000). The revelations made in this study and the dilemmas that emerged from my interactions with the research participants contain important methodological implications for qualitative research.

Dilemmas of Qualitative Research

An important dimension to doing qualitative research is the perspective that the researcher brings to the setting. In addition to making the research process and product more rich and grounded in the context of the lives of the researcher and the researched, this also raises some methodological dilemmas. These dilemmas can be better understood by analyzing them at two levels – Individual and Relational.

On an individual level, as a qualitative researcher, I find it important to reflect on the influence of my positionality on the choice of my research area. Scheurich (1994) remarks that one's historical position, class, race, gender, region, religion, and so on, all of these interact and influence, limit and constrain production of knowledge. I am an immigrant from India, interested in studying issues concerning experiences of other Indian immigrants in the US. During my doctoral program, I had an opportunity to work with on two research projects that dealt with the educational experiences and achievement of Mexican immigrant children in high schools. Working on these aspects forced me to reflect upon the experiences of people like me who come from very different social-cultural backgrounds and who must adjust to new cultural and educational settings. I gradually came to an understanding that in order to make effective

policies for minorities' education, we must first explore the unique experiences of different minority groups. While researching the literature for Mexican immigrants, I started exploring the literature on immigrants from India. I found that though there is some research on the acculturation and adaptation of immigrants from India, not much has been said about the educational experiences and performance of children of these immigrants.

A preliminary review of the literature, my perception of the need for more research on the education of Asian Indian immigrants, and my identity as Asian Indian were the driving forces behind my decision to focus on Asian Indian immigrant families in this study. As an international student, I continually struggled with issues of adjustment in a new cultural and educational setting. Doing this study undoubtedly forced me to reflect upon some of the issues pertaining to living as immigrants in U.S., and impacted my decision to live in this country after finishing my doctoral studies. Thus this project also emerged as a personal quest (Mehra, 2000).

The second level of the methodological dilemmas in qualitative research arises from the interactions and the relations between the researcher and the researched. My status as an Asian Indian put me in a unique situation to conduct this study and to reflect upon my role as a researcher. This project provided an excellent opportunity to analyze the ways in which my being an insider to the Asian Indian culture enhanced my understanding of the research participants' perspectives. I was attentive to and reflective of the situations where I found my own bias and subjectivity creeping into the data collection and analysis.

A qualitative researcher establishes a special relation with research participants over the period of the study. There is often a possibility that this researcher-participant relationship gets substituted with friendship. This research project provided ample possibilities to explore some of the critical ways in which the social and cultural identity of a researcher interacts with his or her role as a researcher and as a friend. Another important ethical and methodological dilemma raised during the study was to distinguish between a casual conversation with a fellow Asian Indian and a piece of data that was relevant for my study. At several instances I had to struggle at considering some of my general interactions with some Asian Indian acquaintances and friends as just plain

conversations and not as data for the study. I, however, did make a note of some of these conversations in my subjectivity journal.

During this research I monitored my roles not just as a researcher, but also as an Asian Indian woman interacting with other Asian Indians. Some parents provided some excellent suggestions on ways to increase involvement and cultural presence of Asian Indian parents in the schools and community at large. As an educational researcher I thought that sharing some of my research findings and recommendations with the rest of Asian Indian community might be useful to the families. As a relatively new member in the Asian Indian community in the town however, I was not sure how my views would be accepted by people who had been living in this country for more than two decades, and who had been able to secure successful academic and professional lives for themselves and their children. Thus interactions between my identity and that of my research participants raised concerns related to the issue of reciprocity in qualitative research.

One of the ways that I used to express and monitor my subjectivity was by keeping a journal of my reactions and reflections on the process as well as the findings of the research. I have published the major issues emerging in that journal elsewhere (Mehra, 2000). That reflective essay provides a deeper appreciation of the interactions between the researcher and the researched, and how the two participate in an interplay of realities of their worlds, which are sometimes conflicting, and at other times consistent.

The Research Participants

This is a study of the cultural and social adaptation patterns of four Asian Indian families in a midwestern university town, named Jeffersonville. Although all the parents are immigrants in this country and have been living in Jeffersonville for the past several years, all the children in the study were born in the US and currently attend local schools. Some characteristics of the participating families are provided in table 1.

Table 1

Preliminary Information about the Families in the Study

Name	No. of years in U.S.	Names and ages of children	Parents' region of emigration from India	Reason for migration	Languages spoken at home	Education level of parents	Occupation
Puri Family Ruchi (M) Rajan (F)	16 (M) 23 (F)	S- Avi (14) D- Deepra (11)	North-central (M & F)	Higher Educ. (F)	Hindi, English	M. S. (M)[c] Ph. D. (F)[d]	At-home (M) Professor (F)
Raj Family Vijaya (M)	18 (M)	D- Ishika[a] (16)	North (M)	Marriage (M)	Hindi, Kashmiri, English	M. D. (M)[c,d]	Physician (M)
Gokul Family Rama (M) Harish (F)	16 (F)	D- Priya (8) D- Sarita (5)	South (M)[b] North-east (F)	Higher Educ. (F)	English	B. A. (M)[d] Ph. D. (F)[d]	High School Teacher (M) Corporate Executive (F)
Sahni Family Neeta (M) Ravi (F)	16 (M) 26 (F)	D- Tanu (14) D- Charu (10) D- Shaloo (5)	West-central (M & F)	Higher Educ. (F)	Gujarati, English	B. S. (M)[d] Ph. D. (F)[d]	At-home (M) Professor (F)

Key : M : Mother F : Father D: Daughter S: Son

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[a] An older son who graduated from the high school two years ago is not one of the research participants.
[b] The mother in this case was born and raised in the U.S., her parents had migrated from a southern state in India.
[c] Highest degree attained in India.
[d] Highest degree attained in U.S.

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The Puri Family

Puris live in a five-bedroom house that they got built about five years ago in a rich neighborhood of Jeffersonville. Many other Asian Indian families live in the same part of the town. Dr. Rajan Puri came to this country in the early-1970s as a graduate student in a large state university. After finishing his doctoral degree, he got a faculty position at the university in Jeffersonville and has been living here since the late 1970s. His wife, Ruchi came to the US in 1980 soon after they got married in India. Both Rajan and Ruchi come from the north-central part of India and speak Hindi as their mother tongue. Rajan is now a tenured professor in his department, and Ruchi is a homemaker who is primarily responsible for decisions regarding the home and children. Over the years, Ruchi has supplemented her Master's degree from India with an associate degree from the local community college.

Puris have two children – Avi and Deepra who are 14 and 11 years old, respectively. The son, Avi is in eighth grade in the middle school, and the daughter, Deepra is in fifth grade in a local elementary school. Both the children were born in US and speak English with no trace of Indian accent.

The Raj Family

Not very far from the Puri family lives the Raj family – the second family who participated in my research. This is a single-parent family headed by the mother, Vijaya who is a physician and works at a local hospital. Vijaya belongs to the northern most part of India close to the Himalayas, and grew up speaking Kashmiri and Hindi. She came to the US in late 1970's as a bride of 6 months, lived on the west coast with her husband for many years and had two children. At the time of the study, Vijaya's son was 19 years old and had graduated from high school a year ago, and her daughter was a junior at a local high school.

The daughter, Ishika, was raised by her grandparents in India till she was five years of age when she moved back with her mother, who by that time had divorced her husband and settled down in Jeffersonville. She now attends the university lab high

school in town. For the purpose of this study, I did not interview Vijaya's son since he has moved away from his mother's house.

The Gokul Family

The third family in the study, Gokuls, provides yet another dimension to my study. Harish Gokul came to US as a graduate student, got his doctorate degree, and married Rama, who was born and raised on the east coast in US. The family had lived in Jeffersonville about two years when I first met them. Earlier they were living in a neighboring town close to Harish's place of work. Harish still works for the same company in that town, but commutes daily. Rama is a certified Math teacher at a high school in Jeffersonville. Unlike Puris, where both the mother and father have similar regional and cultural backgrounds, Harish and Rama come from different backgrounds – not just in terms of their place of birth and bringing up, but also in regard to the region and cultural heritage of their parents and grandparents. Harish was born in the eastern part of India and has Bengali as his mother tongue, though he lived in various parts of India while growing up. Rama's parents had migrated to the US in late 1950's from the southern part of India and speak Telugu. Rama herself was born and brought up in the US and attended American schools and colleges. Harish and Rama Gokul have two daughters, both born in US - Priya, 8, and a second-grader at the time of the study; and Sarita, 5, a kindergartner.

The Sahni Family

The Sahni family has some commonalities with the Puri family. The father, Ravi Sahni, a tenured professor at the university, came to the US as a graduate student, got a job at the university in Jeffersonville, went back to India to get married and brought his newly-wed wife, Neeta to US. Neeta completed an associate degree at the local community college in Jeffersonville before the birth of her oldest daughter, and, like Ruchi Puri, is now a homemaker. Ravi and Neeta belong to the western part of India and speak Gujarati as their mother tongue.

Sahnis have three children – all daughters and born in US – Tanu, 14, a sub-freshman (7th and 8th grade combined class) at the same high school that Ishika Raj attends; Charu, 10, a fourth-grader; and Shaloo, 5, a kindergartner.

More about Children

The eight children in the four families represent a range of ages and grade levels. All of these children were born in the US, and with the exception of Ishika Raj have been entirely raised in the US. Since the most important consideration in the selection of research participants was the consent of the families, it turned out that all but one (Avi Puri) of the children in the study were girls. Table 2 presents an overview of information about each child in the study.

Table 2

Preliminary Information about the Children in the Study

Name	Age	Grade	Kind of Classroom	Knowledge of parents' mother tongue
Avi Puri	14	Eighth	Regular	Can speak, read and write
Deepra Puri	11	Fifth	Regular	Can speak, read and write
Ishika Raj	16	Eleventh	Gifted	Understands, can speak a little
Priya Gokul	8	Second	Gifted	Knows only a few words
Sarita Gokul	5	KG	Regular	Knows only a few words
Tanu Sahni	14	Sub-freshman (combined 7th-8th grade)	Gifted	Understands a little, knows few words
Charu Sahni	10	Fourth	Gifted	Understands a little, knows few words
Shaloo Sahni	5	KG	Regular	Knows only a few words

An important pattern that emerged from this information was that four of the seven girls were enrolled in some kind of gifted educational program. Two girls attended the university laboratory high school in the town, while the other six children went to public schools in the community.

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Living in US as Asian Indians

Several patterns related to social and cultural experiences of these four families emerged from the data. For the purpose of this paper, these patterns are grouped into two broad themes:

1. Cultural Living: Religion, language, socialization, and beyond
2. Communal Living: Interaction, involvement, and isolation

Cultural Living: Religion, Language, Socialization And Beyond

Many Asian Indian children growing up in the US have to face the family pressures of maintaining some traditional values and practices that are important to their parents. The four families in this study represent a considerable range in this regard. This section describes the views of parents in different families in regard to maintaining a cultural identity for their children. I also provide information on different ways that these families have been able to make sense of their bi-cultural identities. This variation in the parents' efforts undoubtedly leads to a difference in their children's sense of cultural identity and the comfort they feel in expressing it at their schools in presence of their peers and teachers.

Traditional Concerns

All the four families in the study are Hindus by religion, though they belong to different regions of India. I asked the parents few questions about the importance of maintaining the religious identity in their children and the things they do in that regard; their answers varied considerably. Both Rajan and Ruchi Puri put a lot of emphasis on maintaining some of the religious traditions and customs and they feel that the only way their children will know about their religious heritage is if they see some of the customs being practiced at home. For the last several years the Puris have been celebrating some of the most important Hindu festivals such as *Diwali* (festival of lights which includes ceremonial worshipping of *Lakshmi* – the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity), *Holi* (festival of colors which celebrates the beginning of Spring), *Karva-chauth* (celebrated only in the northern parts of India, on this day married women observe a day-long fast to be broken at the time of moonrise, and pray for the well-being of their husbands in a communal ceremony,) at their home and inviting a large group of Indian friends over for

celebration and dinner. I had the opportunity of being one of the invited guests for several years before the study and also during this study. At these celebrations, Ruchi dresses in the traditional Indian attire, as does her daughter, Deepra. All around there is a feeling of Indian-ness with the sights of Indian women in silk saris with gold and silver thread embroidery on them, the sounds of old Hindi songs playing in the background, and the aroma of Indian food – vegetables, curries, *pulao* (rice topped with vegetables and nuts), *poori* (deep-fried flat bread made of wheat flour), chutneys, and pickles.

As far as Ruchi Puri is concerned one of the most important aspects of life is to be able to maintain certain traditions and cultural values. She feels a sense of pride in telling me that her children know about major Hindu festivals. She told me –

> "When we have dinner or celebration on either of these days, they get involved in the preparations and enjoy the festivities. Because we have made it a tradition at our home to celebrate these few festivals, the kids have seen it since they were very young and so they understand what it is about. You have to start doing these things when children are still young and you can get them interested only if you do these things regularly."

Ruchi, however, added that as a mother she can only make her children aware of the traditions, whether they are going to maintain them and follow them when they are older and on their own, "it is up to them."

Such an emphasis on maintaining native cultural rituals and practices is not a "standard practice" for all Indian families. Like Ruchi went on to say –"There are some very different families that I have seen. I have seen families where there is more emphasis on American food and lifestyle at home." She gave an example when she tells me that if her children are handed the *Aarti-thali* (a platter used for worshipping, generally used to hold incense sticks, flowers, and other holy materials) at some *Puja* (a ceremonial worship practice generally performed in front of idols and pictures of various Hindu deities), they know what to do with it, "they don't turn back and look at [their mother] to ask what to do at that time, because they know and they have been seeing it and doing it at home." She added that she has seen some Indian children who don't know what to in a similar situation. She emphasized her view about maintaining cultural traditions at home in these words - "I have seen families where it is okay if children don't participate in some of the cultural celebrations, but to me it is important that my children

should participate in all that is going on at home. Different families may have different priorities."

A different set of beliefs, though not necessarily a different set of priorities, is what Harish Gokul described while explaining the need for providing cultural exposure to his 8- and 5-year-old daughters –

> "I think once we have decided that this is the society that we are going to live in, we know that the culture that we belong to is a minority culture. I think we have to accept the fact that we just don't get everything. That is the way the whole world is - minorities never get a fair share of everything. It does not matter whether you call it discrimination or whatever. That is the way life is. We should accept that. We like to make sure that we are educated enough to teach our children about their culture…."

Harish strongly believes that it is the responsibility of parents or the family to provide cultural knowledge and understanding to the children. In response to how he and his wife try to do that, Harish said –"We try to give some sense of the overall culture to my children as they grow, and expose them to certain aspects that are suitable for them to know based upon their phase of development." He also believes that Indian culture in itself is an ever-changing and ever-adapting culture. This belief helps Harish, in some way, to rationalize and legitimize the bi-cultural lifestyle that he and his family have adopted as Asian Indians in US.

The kind of cultural understanding and exposure that Asian Indian children receive depends upon the beliefs and efforts of parents in that regard. Rama Gokul explained –

> "I think it is upto the family how they themselves like to expose their children. I don't know if what I feel has to apply to another Indian family. There can be different ways of exposing the children to their native culture. I feel that how each family wants to do that is personal to each family."

Rama added that though culture and religion in India are linked in many ways, different families feel differently about the two. Some Indians in US who are more religious-minded like to see that their children are also brought up in that way. In order to teach their children about different religious practices, rituals, and customs, some of them go to the extent of creating Sunday classes where they make sure that children learn all about their religion. Rama and Harish Gokul tell me that they place more emphasis on cultural

rather than religious aspects of their and their children's Indian identity. Rama also said that she and her husband don't want to put any pressure on their children, though they believe that children should have enough exposure to their cultural heritage. She added –

> "In the house itself, we don't do a whole lot. My husband and I are not very religious, but we do go to Clayton for *Durga Puja* (a ceremony to worship *Durga* – the Hindu goddess of strength)... And then here, locally with the Bengali Association, we participate in some functions like *Saraswati Puja* (a ceremony to worship *Saraswati*- the Hindu goddess of learning and wisdom – more commonly celebrated in the part of India that Harish Gokul belongs to). Then there is the Tagore Festival (a local cultural event in Jeffersonville organized by the Indian community, which celebrates the literary and cultural contributions of Rabindra Nath Tagore, a Nobel laureate; the event generally includes some talks, cultural programs, and dinner), which is a big cultural event for Bengali community. We take our children to that because it gives them good exposure."

Unlike Puris, Sahnis do not perform their religious practices at home, but like Gokuls they attend the community-wide celebrations, though their extent of participation is much more limited than Gokuls. Neeta Sahni, the mother, believes that parents can only provide children with opportunities to get exposed to their native cultural traditions, but the rest depends on the children. She explained –

> "I don't think there should be much problem in maintaining your native culture with your children, but it mainly depends upon the children, if they want to, they can maintain traditions. We parents can't force them to do that. But I would certainly want them to know about their traditions."

Neeta also feels that it is important for children to be aware of and respect the values their parents believe in, and both she and her husband, Ravi emphasize the importance of discipline in their home in that regard. Neeta talked about the importance of having family values that must be passed on to the children – values such as honesty, truthfulness, hard work and discipline. She also added –

> "If children are raised in a family where there are certain values, and where things are done in a particular way, it makes a difference. When I was growing up, my parents never talked about drugs, alcohol, and there was no such problem like that. And as a parent, I try to provide same kind of bringing up for my children. It is good that at least in schools here they talk about things like drug problems, or alcoholism, so the children know what is good or bad. If the kids know what is good and what is bad, they are not going to do the wrong things, or go into the wrong path."

As a mother, Neeta is very particular of the kind of values she wants to instill in her children, and according to her, a lot depends upon what parents expect for their children. She further added –

> "In some families where both the parents work full-time, there can be problems in raising children in the right way, because the parents don't have enough time. You may be so much educated yourself, but if you don't spend enough time with your children, and you don't do certain things with them, your education does not help children at all. As parents you have to decide what you want, you have to decide your priorities, and what you want in your life, and what you want for your children. You don't have to be a PhD to get this thing straight."

In these words Neeta is also touching upon the issue of being an at-home mother and the amount of time she can spend with her children as compared to someone like Vijaya Raj, who is a physician and is away from her children for long hours because of her hectic work schedule. Vijaya, being a single parent, has to work full-time and put in long hours to provide the kind of lifestyle for her children that she says, she "always dreamed of." Also since her children are now grown up teenagers, they are very much independent and capable to taking care of themselves.

Issues of maintaining religious and cultural identity are, however, again visible aspects of the Raj family. In the words of Vijaya Raj –

> "I think that if I had to do it again, I would think twice about moving to US, because there is lot to be said about living in another culture. You pay a big price in moving to any foreign country; you cut yourself off socially and emotionally from your family and your relations back home. How good or bad it is – I don't know that. When I first came here, I thought I was so strong that I can keep my culture and language intact but it is not easy. I have been able to maintain my culture to a great extent and hopefully I have been able to pass on some of our cultural values to my children, but language – I have not been able to maintain that. I feel bad about that because I think it is also due to my laziness."

The Company They Keep

In contrast to the view expressed in the previous paragraph, laziness is not what Ruchi and Rajan Puri can afford when organizing their *Diwali* and *Holi* celebrations at home and preparing an authentic Indian dinner for at least 25-30 people. Everyone in the Puri household, including the children Avi and Deepra, gets involved in making arrangements for the bi-annual holiday celebrations that have become a part of the life of

this family. Children from various families, who are invited to Puris' house for these celebrations have known each other for many years now, and as Deepra said, "look forward to these events because we [the children] get to hang out together and have fun." The noises of children playing in the basement of Puris' house is topped by the animated voices of men and women chatting away – in two separate groups. Men tend to gather around in one group and discuss their careers, sports, investment opportunities, house mortgages and so on. In the other corner of the big family room are the women talking about a variety of things from *sarees* to movies to recipes to children. This kind of grouping is not intended but seems to be more convenient and comfortable for everybody around. Avi jokingly told me about this arrangement at parties the very first time I met him at a social get-together at his home.

Having Indian people over for dinner and social get-togethers is also an important way of socialization for children into the Indian community. Making a funny distinction between the "men's room," and the "women's room," at Indian parties, Ishika Raj talked about this aspect of socialization in these words –

> "All the Indian men go and sit somewhere and talk, and all the women go into the kitchen and talk there. It is so amazing. I wonder if the kids will also start doing that…And only the men can go out and smoke. That is another thing. If you see a girl or a woman going outside to smoke, it is so surprising for everybody."

Ishika finds such a social arrangement strange and inconvenient because she likes to hang out with her brother and his friends. She added – "The women sometimes bore me so much with many of the things they talk about – all they talk about is clothes, and I really don't care how much this *sari* costs, or that *sari* costs." She finds the "whole traditional role thing" restrictive and confining because she believes that women are as able to contribute as any other man to a discussion about books or politics that is often limited to the "men's room" at most Indian social gatherings.

Socialization of children into the traditional gender roles is another function served by some of the social gatherings in Asian Indian homes. Sixteen-year old Ishika Raj talked about her reaction to some of the traditional Indian cultural values in these words - "There are some things and traditional values in Indian culture that make me pretty mad. I mean, I am expected to behave in a particular way because I am a girl." She

talked about an instance that happened during the time when her grandmother was living with them. One day when Ishika's brother (who likes to cook, and is pretty good at it, according to Ishika) was cooking, her grandmother told Ishika to help him in the kitchen and insisted that Ishika should be cooking instead of her brother. In Ishika's own words –"This kind of thing makes me very mad, just because I am a girl; I am expected to learn cooking and to be helping out my brother in the kitchen." She tells me another incident to emphasize her point of view –

> "I was visiting some cousins in Michigan, and you won't believe it - I was always expected to help out in the kitchen everyday around the mealtime, either in cooking or setting or clearing the table. It really bothered me. I was mad because my male cousins would just sit around, doing nothing, or watching TV, and nobody would tell them to do anything. And even though I was a guest in their house, I was sort of expected to be helping out at the meal time just because I am a girl."

In the above paragraph, Ishika is talking about the commonly accepted norms and behaviors in the dominant Indian society that parents expect their children to know and follow, even though they are presently living in a culture that is different from the one that the parents grew up in and in some ways more open and liberal than the Indian middle class culture that the parents belonged to in India. An interesting remark that Ishika's mother, Vijaya, made in one of the conversations points out to this dichotomy between two cultures and the way it is melting away. She said –

> "People who came here say twenty years ago, have frozen a picture of India in their minds, and they assume that everything is standing still in India and that all has remained the same there in all the time that they have been here. They have these cultural values that are frozen in their minds, but the fact is that with time and progress, cultural values have changed in India too. Indian society has and is undergoing big changes that people here don't know about or don't want to know about. When I saw my nephew who was visiting from India five years ago, I was completely shocked, because I had assumed that he would be growing up exactly the way I grew up. But then I realized that I have to change my thinking about India, I haven't been to India in the last twelve years actually. There is so much advancement there now, not just in terms of material things but people's attitudes and values as well – especially among the younger generation."

According to Vijaya, Indians living in the US are generally more backward in their thinking than Indians in India. She believes that Asian Indian parents should not put too many pressures on their children to follow certain traditions and values that don't

make much sense in the society they are living in. She further believes that parents who put too many restrictions on children may actually get distant from their children because "these children who are growing up in America, and who are going to American schools and colleges, are doing almost all the things that their American friends are doing."

Matters of the Native Tongue

One thing that all eight children in this study do "just like an American" is - talk the talk. Al these children, born and brought up in US, talk in English with no trace of any Indian accent. They all agree that English is what naturally comes to them as a medium of communication with their parents as well as other Indians in the community. Some earlier experiences of two children in the study – Ishika Raj and Deepra Puri were the only exceptions when these children had to face "any trouble with English." Ishika, who was raised by her grandparents in India till she was five years old, did not know any English when she first came to live with her mother in US. For some time she went through some of the similar experiences that any five-year-old non-English speaking child goes through in an American elementary school. Deepra Puri, who visits India regularly with her family, had to attend English as Second Language (ESL) classes for the whole kindergarten year when she had "completely forgotten English" after an extended stay of almost four months in India. At the time of the study, all the children used English as their first language.

An important aspect in regard to maintaining and expressing the native cultural identity is the knowledge of native language. Parents in all the four families have different experiences, beliefs and expectations in regard to this issue. Rajan and Ruchi Puri believe that it is very important for children to know their native language and they have implemented their belief by starting a Sunday school for Hindi language at their home. In addition to the two Puri children, the school has now about 15 Asian Indian children – born and raised in US - of parents belonging to different parts of India, and many of them with native language other than Hindi. About her efforts to maintain the use of native language at home Ruchi said – "We are not able to speak in Hindi very much at home. I try it often, but then Rajan generally speaks in English – that is what comes out of habit, or whatever." About their motivation to start the Hindi class, Rajan told me –

> "We were a little selfish, we thought it would help our kids. It was this sense of discipline that we thought would help our kids learn if we set one hour every week for them to learn Hindi. Then some of our friends also got interested and started sending their children for the class. And gradually, we felt that this was a good thing if we can convey to these kids some cultural stuff, some knowledge of language in a way so that it stays in their hearts. Once you learn it, you don't lose it. Our interest in Hindi class now is not only that our children should learn the language, but it is more as a service to the Indian community."

In the Hindi classes at their home, Rajan and Ruchi have found that the children are generally quick to learn to read and even write the language, "but they can't speak that well." Rajan believes that the reason that these children can't speak Hindi is because their parents don't speak in Hindi at home.

Rajan and Ruchi often tell their children, Avi and Deepra, to speak in Hindi at home, and the weekly Hindi class at their home appears to be helping. Rajan told me that Avi and Deepra are somewhat more native language proficient than some other Indian children in the Hindi class, mainly because they get to visit India pretty regularly. In India, Avi and Deepra have to speak in Hindi with their grandparents and other relatives, so they learn the language very quickly in that context.

On the other end of the spectrum lies the Sahni family where maintaining the native language is not a priority for parents and children. The Sahni children – especially the older two daughters – can understand their parents' native language, Gujarati, a little, and may also speak few sentences, but they can't read or write Gujarati. Their mother, Neeta, said –

> "My husband and I do not talk to each other in Gujarati most of the time because that way our children may not understand what we are saying. With children, we have to speak in English anyway. When children are speaking to each other it is generally English. Sometimes they try to speak in Gujarati, but it is usually very small sentences, or small phrases."

Neeta herself would like her children to learn Gujarati, and has tried to give some informal instruction at home. On her last trip to India she got some Gujarati books for her children and has since been trying to teach them the language "a little whenever they feel like." In her words –

> "I don't force that they have to learn Gujarati. Tanu and Charu are learning Latin also in their schools. So they both are learning two languages anyway. I put more

> emphasis on English because their whole academic future depends upon that. If they don't learn English well, it will be hard for them when they go to higher classes. So I don't want them to mess up with that by forcing them to learn Gujarati."

These views are somewhat in contrast to those expressed by parents in the Puri family, where learning the native language has become a part of the weekly routine of the children. Also, Rajan and Ruchi Puri believe that since schools generally take good care of their children's knowledge of English, it is left to them - the parents to take similar care of children's knowledge of native language. Making this a priority and a parental responsibility, Rajan and Ruchi have tried to assure that their children maintain a bi-cultural identity as Asian Indians in US. Neeta Sahni, on the other hand, believes that her responsibility is first to insure the academic success of her children, which is based on a strong knowledge of English. Though she expresses a desire for her children to learn their native language, her husband, Ravi, has some different views.

Ravi Sahni does not consider maintaining the native language at home as an important issue and looks at the adaptation patterns of earlier European immigrants in the US to explain his point of view. In his words –

> "I don't consider it an important issue, because I know that if my children are going to settle here, it does not matter. I use other immigrant groups as example. Majority of immigrants who came to this country in 1900s – whether they were Polish, Italians, or Germans – all of them have lost their language and have became American. I know that language is a big problem in India. So I don't want to create any such problems in my home."

Ravi encourages his children to learn foreign languages at school, but doesn't think that it is important for them to learn Gujarati. He told me that his eldest daughter, Tanu (14-year old) had recently started to express some interest in learning Gujarati, so he and his wife told her that they would try to talk to her in Gujarati more often at home. Ravi emphasized the fact that it was Tanu's own initiative, "she wanted to get back to her native language in some way." He added that he and his wife occasionally try to speak with their children in Gujarati, but "don't teach the language as such." He told me that none of his daughters knows the Gujarati alphabet. Ravi did not consider it as a loss for his children –

> "It is a strange thing – I don't know why do I have to stick to the language... These are American children of Indian parents, but they are Americans. They should stay in the American culture; there is no reason why they should not. The curiosity is fine, if they want to learn Hindi or Gujarati as any other foreign language, I don't care."

It thus appears that parents' beliefs about and efforts toward maintaining the use of native language at home and teaching the native language to their children differ by family.

In the Gokul family, the diversity of Indian culture adds to the complexity of the situation as the parents themselves have different native languages. Rama's parents speak Telugu at home, while Harish grew up speaking Bengali. Both the children in the family understand few words of both the languages, and their knowledge of either language increases a little when they visit that side of the family. While talking about the family's last visit to India, Rama told me that her children were able to understand some Bengali, though they could not speak it. But by the time the family left from India, the children had picked up few more words and phrases. Rama added – "Now I think if we continue to speak with them in Bengali, they might be able to pick some more. And they know a few of the words and phrases of Telugu too, because when they visit my parents on the east coast, that is what they hear there." Rama believes that parents can't and shouldn't force their children to learn the native language. About her efforts to teach either of the two Indian languages to the children, Rama said -

> "I can't say they have to sit down on the weekend and study the language. It is not fair to the children also. As long as we can do it in certain ways, like if they like the music, they can listen to the music, and then through that they can gain some knowledge of the language. Children should know their language, appreciate it and respect it, and as much as they can they should understand and try to learn, but it is upto them after a point, I think..."

Thus in Gokul family, the pressure to maintain the native language is not there, though the parents feel that it is important for the children to be exposed to other aspects of the culture, and that a working knowledge of the language can be acquired through learning native music and dance. In Rama's own words –

> "We get involved in some cultural activities, and we do some practices either at home or if we go somewhere else for the rehearsals, the kids come with us. Bengalis as a group, I think, are very much into cultural things like music and dance. In a way it is good, because that way my kids also learn something, and they pick up some, they are interested in that. There are some dance classes available here too in town

> and I too can actually do some *Bharatnatyam* (a classical dance form that originated in the southern part of India). I learned that for several years in the US only, though I have not been actively practicing it for few years. My husband also knows some Indian classical music. So between my husband and I we can teach our children some things, though I am not giving them any formal training as yet. But the children have some sense of it, and I want them to show their own interest also, not just impose anything on them."

Rama and Harish believe that if they provide enough cultural exposure to their children, and if the children themselves enjoy and show an interest in learning, they will be able to learn more about their culture than they would under parental pressure.

In between the two cases of Puris and Sahnis, I can situate the case of Raj family. According to the mother, Vijaya Raj, it is possible to keep maintaining the native language to some extent, and she talked about some Indian families where children can fluently speak in their native language. She, like Puris, believes that use of native language at home creates a difference in children's knowledge of the native language. She, however, thinks that for most families, it is difficult to maintain the use of native language at home –

> "In my case, it was easier for me to talk to them in English to develop a better understanding among us – it was easier because that way we could avoid any confusion. But I think that children can pick up the language anytime if they want to, so that is not a problem. I think it would be a good idea for them to learn the language, because that way they can feel a little bit at ease with some of our cultural beliefs and values. They can understand better some of the aspects of our culture if they know the language. Certain things can't be explained in English, like meaning of certain rituals and ceremonies that we have."

Vijaya believes that it is important for children to know the native language and that it is possible for children to learn that in a variety of ways. Like Rama Gokul, she uses other aspects of Indian culture – from classical music to popular Hindi movies - to exert the influence of language on her children. She gave an example –

> "Last weekend I took Ishika [her16-year-old daughter] to St. Louis to see an Indian movie. I told her briefly the plot of the film, because I had seen it earlier also. As we were watching, she constantly kept on asking me – what is he or she saying now, what does this mean, what does that mean, and so on. So I noticed that she was taking an interest in understanding the film. The knowledge of language would have helped. Every time she listens to any Hindi song in my car, she would ask me what a

particular word or a line means. So she is taking an interest in understanding the language, and knowing the popular Indian culture."

Ishika can understand Hindi sufficiently well, knows quite a few Hindi words, and can also speak a little in the language. Vijaya finds her daughter's sense of curiosity about Hindi interesting, and feels confident that she can easily learn Hindi if she wants to.

Learning the language is not simply learning its grammatical structure and rules, it also has to be placed in the contemporary or popular cultural context so that it becomes a living language. This is what Vijaya's attempts to introduce her daughter, Ishika, to Hindi movies and music are doing – making Hindi a living language for her to want to learn. Ishika also told me that she plans to take Hindi classes in college. Watching Indian movies and listening to Indian music are also common practices in Puri and Gokul families, though not in Sahni family.

Learning the native language has another purpose too according to Vijaya Raj, who believes that being bilingual is always better than knowing only one language. In her words –"Imagine the edge you have over everybody else. I think it is important for children to learn another language – mainly for the reason of knowing another language." She added that it would be important for her children to know Hindi, because they associate themselves with other Indians. "They [children] still see themselves as Indians, not as Americans. So if they know Hindi, they will always have a connection with India."

Frequent Flyers

This notion of making a connection with India is the primary reason why many Indian families make frequent trips to India. During the course of this research, members from all the four families had visited India – in one case it was more than once. These visits to India are an important way for the children to know their grandparents and other relatives who live in India. The bond of the extended family network, generally an important aspect of Indian society, is maintained by most of the Asian Indian families in the US through regular contact – physical, postal, or telephonic means (Saran, 1985). In my research I found a variation among the four families in regard to this aspect.

I had to delay my first meeting with Sahnis because Neeta was visiting her family in India. She later told me that they try to visit India every two or three years -

> "Last time we had gone three and a half years ago. The kids were very young at that time, but they all remember their visit… I often tell my children about my family, we talk about many things and the children are sometimes very interested to know. They sometimes find some things very strange when we talk about the time when I was growing up."

Neeta has tried to maintain close contacts with her family in India by way of regularly writing "long letters" and making occasional phone calls to them. Her husband, Ravi holds a slightly different view on this aspect of maintaining links with his relatives in India. Being the youngest in his family, Ravi found all his brothers and sisters well settled with their own families before leaving home for US. He admitted that he has very little link with his family in India, and this has gotten "lesser and lesser" since his parents' demise –

> "I used to visit India may be every three years or so. My children would love to go there, but it is just getting harder and harder for five people to travel. It is expensive too, and it is hard to get tickets during December because that is peak season, but that is the time I can take a break from work. It is very complicated."

Children in the Sahni family have not been to India during last four years.

The "complications" of making the travel arrangements for a trip to India are not too much of a problem for Puris who visit India almost every two years, and during this research the family visited there twice for two very specific reasons. About their first trip to India in mid-fall, Ruchi explained –

> "This trip in October is mainly for showing children how *Dussehra* (a festival celebrating the victory of good over evil) and *Diwali* (a festival to worship the goddess of wealth and prosperity) are celebrated in India. It is totally different environment there at this time of the year, and I want to show my children that kind of festivity and environment. As they are getting older, their school obligations are also increasing, it might get more and more difficult, so we thought that this might be the right time to take the kids to India this year—during festival season."

Parents in this family used this particular visit to India as a way to increase the cultural awareness of their children about some of the Indian holidays that the family has always celebrated in US. They wanted the children to witness how those holidays are celebrated in their grandparents' home in India. Taking this trip in the middle of the school year meant that both Avi, (an eighth-grader) and Deepra (a fifth-grader) had to

miss school for a month, so Ruchi made special arrangements with the teachers who gave the children specific assignments to do while they were in India. She also made sure that the teachers knew about the purpose of the visit, and that the children made up for the lost time when they returned from India.

Eight months later, the Puri family again packed their suitcases and made a trip to India – this time to attend a cousin's wedding in Ruchi's side of the family. These frequent trips have helped Avi and Deepra to build relationships with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in India. In Ruchi's words –"It is not just the visit, whenever we go to India, we stay for at least 3-4 months over the summer, so they get to know the relatives better. Some of my cousins have children who are almost same age as Avi and Deepra, so they get along quite well. Deepra is also very close to her grandmother."

One aspect of these trips to India that is relevant to understanding the duality of cultural experience of Asian Indian children is the pattern of adjustment that the children go through. Ruchi, whose family visits India almost every two years, told me that her children usually adapt very well in India, especially her daughter. It doesn't take very much time for children to get used to the change in place, or to relate to their cousins. They usually remember everyone from their last visit and get settled "pretty nicely and quickly." And as to how the children relate to their cousins – in what language, their mother explained –

> "Some of my cousins say that if they want to hear Avi's American accent they should meet him in the first two weeks of his visit [to India], because after that he even loses his American accent and starts speaking Hindi quite fluently."

Ruchi added that this phenomenon was actually more prominent when Avi was younger, when he would start speaking Hindi fluently and also in the style that only the native speakers can. She has not seen that happen during their last two visits to India. In case of her daughter, Deepra, 11, Ruchi told me that till Deepra was 8 or 9 years old, every time she went to India, she would just forget English while she was there. Deepra was in an ESL class for a year when she first started school. Her mother adds that even now Deepra actually needs some time to pick up English after she gets back to the US.

Visiting India as frequently as the Puri family does is not always fun for the children who are beginning to understand and deal with their bi-cultural identities. Ruchi told me this about her son, Avi, who is now 14 years old –

> "One thing that Avi does not like, when we are in India, is when people there sometimes make fun of some of the American things or ways of doing things. It bothers him. He would say to me – 'when I don't make fun of any Indian things or ways, why do people there have to say such things or make fun of American ways.' He had some taste of that last time."

A taste of the cultural shock is what Ishika Raj, 16, experienced on her trip to India few months before this study, when she and her brother visited India after eleven years. Their visit was for the dual purpose of attending a wedding in the extended family, and sightseeing. Ishika and her mother have been able to maintain a link with their relatives in India, even though they have not visited India as frequently as Puris. But as Vijaya talked about her impressions of her children's trip to India –

> "One of the things that I have realized after they came back from their trip to India last month is that they now have a fairly strong sense of identity – as to who they are. And I think they associate themselves with India, and not in a negative way like you will find some other Indian teenagers and adults who criticize India for so many reasons. Ishika felt that it was a very fascinating experience for her, and she said that she would like to go to India again soon. I think it was a revival of identity for her."

Vijaya added that a similar thing happened to her 19-year-old son as well. These trips to India provide a means for building a sense of Indian identity for these children, and a way for strengthening it for their parents. Other functions performed by these frequent trips to India, as discussed in the previous section, include contextualizing the native language and making it a "living" one for Asian Indian children born and living in the US.

Identifying the Self - "I am what I am"

The duality of the cultural experiences of children participating in this study raises the issue of how they identify themselves. Parents' sense of their identity and their understanding of their children's self-identity are important aspects of the dual cultural experience that Asian Indian children in this study often have at their homes. Ravi Sahni explained his view –

"We just do normal things what other families also do - like celebrate the American holidays, for example on Halloween children go for trick-or-treating. We have been celebrating Thanksgiving for years now. But we also celebrate Indian holidays. We do both - it is not one or the other. So children see both kinds of things. But they do know that they are Indians, that is for sure. We don't make it a point to kind of emphasize their Indian identity. But I think that unknowingly, once in a while their mother may have done that. Like she would say – 'when I was a kid, I would do it this way.' This is actually just to discipline them or to make a point. But then Tanu (14-year-old) would come back at her and say – 'but you are an Indian, Americans don't do that.' So occasionally that happens. At her age now, Tanu understands the difference in our discipline requirements or our general practices of parenting at our home, which may be different than many American standards. Our standards may be same as other Indians - but I don't know that."

Children like Tanu gradually become aware of the often conflicting value system of their parents and the dominant society that they live in, and they develop their own ways to resolve the dilemmas of living a bi-cultural life by striking a delicate balance between the two, creating a sense of self-identity as Indians and as Americans. When I asked Tanu how she identifies herself – as an Indian in America or as an American with Indian parents, I noticed a sign of confusion on her face, though her reply was –"Pretty normal, just like anybody else in school."

Sixteen-year-old Ishika described her individual identity in these words –

"I feel more like an American trying to be Indian, because I had lost touch with my Indian identity, and now I am trying to get back to it. I have always felt that I am not a real Indian, because I don't think the same way that other Indian kids in school do. I didn't know much about my culture, I mean I knew about some of the myths and stories, but I didn't really know a lot about it."

Up until two years ago, Ishika never had any Indian friends at all. There were not many Indians in her classes at grade school. But at her present high school, she usually has 3 or 4 Indian students in all her classes. Talking about her friendship pattern, Ishika said –

"When I was growing up, I would always hang out with Americans. I never made any difference between Whites and Blacks, but I didn't have a friend who was Asian or Indian. I thought of myself actually as an American, until I realized it that being an American does not mean that I have to quit being an Indian."

Ishika's mother, Vijaya, told me that though she doesn't know exactly how her children feel about their identity because they have never actually talked about it at home, she is pretty sure that her kids don't shy away from saying that they are Indians. Vijaya, however, knows exactly where to look for a culturally and ethnically gratifying experience for herself - her day-long trips to the Indian ethnic market street in Clayton, a big metropolitan city about 150 miles from her home. In one of our conversations, she referred to these trips as a "cure for nostalgia for the next six weeks," and was also critical of the attitudes of Indians "who do not want to go there, because they think it is so dirty, or it smells there." Scrounging for deals on *saris* at the racks in the Indian dress shops, admiring the shiny posters of the *Bollywood* (Indian counterpart of Hollywood, the center of Indian film industry) movie stars at the video and music stores, and eating the spicy *pani-puri chaat* (spicy Indian snacks, topped with a blend of hot and sour chutneys) at an Indian fast food restaurant in the Indian street is probably one way for Vijaya to get in touch with her Indian identity, and more importantly, to express a sense of being comfortable with it. About her sense of her children's identity, she said – "They will always be Indians – may be ten generations from now, when there are more and more mixed marriages, things might change then. But for now, these kids will always call themselves Indians."

Like Vijaya Raj, Ruchi Puri is also sure of her children's self-identity. She believes that her children will always remain Indian and will not become American, because the parents "have not become American." She realizes that she does not have any "control over what happens in next generation." Explaining her comfort level with her own bi-cultural identity, Ruchi told me that she wants her children also to participate in both cultures. In her words –

> "I don't stop my children to celebrate Halloween or Thanksgiving. But they also have to participate in Indian celebrations. I try to balance it out - that is important to me. I don't feel anything wrong in celebrating Christmas. I want my children to be a part of the dominant culture also - so that they also can tell their friends about the gifts they got for Christmas, they should not be deprived of that pleasure."

Ruchi's eleven-year old daughter, Deepra told me that many of her Indian friends consider themselves American, though she would "rather be an Indian." She talked about her self-identity in these words – "Usually I tell people that I am an Indian, my parents

were born in India, but I was born here. But still I am partly Indian, and partly American." Deepra's 14-year-old brother, Avi lets his friends do the job of explaining his identity –

> "All my friends know that I am an Indian. I had one friend who was with me since third grade – he was my first friend in the elementary school. He was with me till sixth grade after which he went to another school. If anybody asked me, he would always say that I am an Indian. He knew a lot about me, and I knew about him. When we first became friends, he would ask me about myself, and I would say that my parents came from India. He would tell about his parents… he is an American. And so if you tell one person, it just spreads. I don't say I am an Indian. I usually don't say until it is mentioned."

Identifying as an Indian or an American was a painful experience for Avi in his trip to India two years ago. His mother, Ruchi, explained –

> "When we are there in India, Avi does not like when somebody calls him American or makes fun of him if he speaks some Hindi word with an accent. But it is not just the kids who would say something like that to him; it is the adults who would sometimes say to him – 'Hey American.' Avi does not like that. I think he was a little bothered by that."

Ruchi added that at few occasions, Avi expressed his resentment in these words – "How would they [people in India] like if I call them – 'Hey Indian?' I am what I am, why does anyone have to make an issue of that?"

Circle of Friends

Honoring Avi's view and not making a further issue of the identity of these children in my study, I now describe another important aspect of their lives – friends. Sixteen-year-old Ishika Raj told me that until recently she did not have many Asian Indian friends, and she would usually "hang out with [her] American friends." She explained to me how she has been able to develop friendships with some Asian Indian teenagers, some of whom go to India frequently with their parents and have picked up enough knowledge of popular Indian culture including movies, music, fashion, and so on. She said – "Most of the Indian girls are into Indian fashion and Indian movies. They all go to India very frequently, and so they are upto date on all that stuff. They know all the actors and movie stars." She added that since she did not know much about any of this "stuff," she did not feel she could connect to those Indian teenagers. When I asked her if

knowing about things like Indian movies and actors would make her feel more Indian and like other Indians at school, her reply was –

> "I am a lot more into those things now, because I have the link. We have TV Asia (an Asian cable channel which can be accessed via a satellite dish) at home, which means now I can watch Indian movies[2], and now I know all the new songs. That is the reason why I am friends with most of the Indians now. I also take *Bharatnatyam* (a south-Indian classical dance) classes, and there are some Indian girls there that I am friends with. And then there is this one more common thing - none of us is fluent in Hindi, and we all know little bit, and we speak Hindi almost like each other in an American accent. We can talk in Hindi about something or just about Indian film songs and laugh about it, and other people don't know what we are talking about it. It is kind of fun."

Ishika and her Indian friends have found something cultural-specific in common that they can talk about and none of their American peers in school know or understand anything about it.

This cultural-specific understanding is also the basis of friendship between eleven-year-old Deepra and her Indian friends. She explained –

> "This is the first year actually that I have been really good friends with Americans. Well, I have had them for sometime, but they were not as close. Usually I wouldn't give them any Christmas presents or anything. Or I wouldn't invite them to my birthday or anything. But this year I have some close American friends. I gave them Christmas presents, but I haven't invited them for birthday. See, you don't know what to do with them. Whenever I think of inviting them for my birthday, or sleepover, I am always wondering how I am going to entertain them. With Indian friends, I feel more secure. I would trust them more. That is what I feel."

Her 14-year-old brother, Avi, shares the same view, though he has found a way of keeping his two groups of friends separate. In his words –

> "I have school friends whom I don't invite over. I don't feel too comfy – comfy with them. Also, I don't know how my American friends will get along with my Indian friends. I do invite American friends, but when I do that, I invite all American friends – no Indian friends, except one who rides in the bus with us and so he knows a lot of my friends. May be I would invite him, but usually I don't invite any Indian friend. Then if I do invite Indian friends, I don't invite my school friends who are almost all Americans."

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[2] My interactions with many other Asian Indians in town suggests that watching Indian movies is a common source of entertainment for many Asian Indian families. In this study, I found this to be true in the cases of Puris and Rajs, though Ruchi Puri is very particular about the kind of movies her children should watch. Sahnis, on the other hand, do not watch Indian movies at home, and no information about this aspect was gathered in the case of Gokuls.

Avi added that he generally doesn't invite his school friends over to his house. He further stated that after school he usually plays with his Indian friends who live around, and that none of his school friends lives in his neighborhood.

The Dating Game

Raising children in a culture that is different from the one that parents themselves were raised in adds to the already complicated task of parenting. Parents in Puri and Sahni families seemed to express a sense of confusion in response to my query about their thoughts on dating and cross-gender relations that are an important part of the "growing up American" culture. Ruchi, mother of Avi, 14, and Deepra, 11, had this to say –

> "I have no idea…but it is an important issue to handle. I guess, most Indian parents don't talk much about things like dating and sex when their kids are younger, in American families you find that parents tell their kids about these things at very young age. We have talked to Avi about few things, but I guess we have always felt that our children may not be involved in such things at least for some time to come, so we are not that concerned also. But I don't want my children to be ignorant and get into trouble… I want to talk to them."

When I asked Ruchi if she and her husband had thought how they were going to "handle these issues," her reply was -

> "I would talk to them frankly about it and let them know what we expect, but at the same time not being very rigid. But again, I can't just go and talk to them like it is just an ordinary thing…. It is quite tricky to handle such things. I would rather first know what they are doing, how they feel about these things instead of getting on their backs… Let's see how things turn out, but so far everything seems fine…"

Ruchi believes that children often get influenced from their friends, but in order to do well at school, children have to know their priorities well and resist peer pressure. She further believes that it is the responsibility of parents to ensure that children are not "carried away with things like dating and peer influence". She said – "Just the other day I was talking to Deepra, and I told her that we are still Indians here, but if they do something within limits, I will accept that." Ruchi explained her limits of acceptance in these words –

> "I guess it won't be okay if Avi asks for one-to-one dating at this point, I think it is too early for 14-15 year old kids. May be when he is in college or at least in the senior year in high school – then it could be okay, but if he has to study hard, and do something in life, he does not need any distraction like that. And all this dating business takes up so much time."

A similar view was expressed by Neeta Sahni who thinks that dating can wait until Tanu, her 14-year old daughter, finishes her education. She added that Tanu should first finish her high school, "and probably at least half of her college too, then it is her decision what she wants to do." Neeta shared Ruchi's opinion that her children should first concentrate only on their education and should not "mess that up." In her words –

> "I think it is too early for a high school kid or a middle school kid to think about dating. I would tell my daughters to concentrate on their education, finish school, and think about dating later. They have plenty of time to date – I mean they are only 22 years old after four years of college, so that is just the right time to think about dating."

In response to my question whether she has talked to her 14-year-old daughter, Tanu, about her views on dating, Neeta's reply was that Tanu hasn't "even asked anything about it." Neeta proudly told me that Tanu and her friends are busy with their school work, and sports, and that Tanu "hasn't even gone out with friends for movies and things like that." She added that she would wait till her daughters raised the issue of dating to decide how to "handle it."

To find out the children's perspective on this issue, I asked some of them if they or their friends are "into dating." Fifth-grader Deepra Puri shared this with me –

> "Some kids in my school talk about dating. Some people in my class actually go out too…I think they are pretty young, but I don't really even talk about that stuff. Actually Indian people don't go out. They don't talk about it that much, American people are more eager to go out."

Her eighth-grader brother, Avi, interjected at this point –

> "But there are a lot of American kids too who are not into all this dating stuff. They are basically into studying or sports or something else… And then, group dates are also common, where a whole bunch of people would go out to eat, or to a movie or mall or something."

Though Avi or Deepra hadn't gone out with a "bunch" of friends, they had occasionally gone to the movies with some other Indian friends and their parents.

Fourteen-year-old Tanu Sahni "doesn't really get to talk about dating" at her school. With her mother sitting in the chair just opposite to us, Tanu told me that some children in her class talk about dating, and "there are few people who go out too, though it is usually in groups." The thing that she likes most about her present school is the freedom that she could not have in her middle school till last year. She had attended three school dances in her first year in the high school, and described them as "pretty cool." Sixteen-year-old Ishika Raj who goes to the same school as Tanu shared her views on dating – "I do not believe in casual dating just for the purpose of dating. When I will start going out with someone, it will be very serious, and I wouldn't make that sort of commitment to just anyone." She turned the conversation to the issue of marriage, and more importantly inter-cultural marriages when she said –

> "To me my culture is very important. That is one of the reason why I think that when I grow up and happen to fall in love with someone, I hope that the person would be Kashmiri, not just an Indian, but Kashmiri. This ethnic group of Kashmiris is dying out quickly, that is why I think of being with a Kashmiri. I think I would be a lot happier, because that way if I have a child, he or she would grow up knowing our culture. But it is all in the future, and who knows?"

Since the aspect of maintaining cultural identity was found to be important for most of the parents in this study, it was felt imperative to understand their reactions to the issue of inter-cultural marriages for their children. Ruchi Puri told me her view –

> "I have talked to my kids about inter-racial marriage... I have told them that I would be very happy if they marry somebody who is an Indian, but even if they marry someone else, I would still accept that person, and love him or her as my family member."

She feels that inter-racial marriage is a conflicting situation, and often parents' ambiguous and unclear views on this issue can be "confusing to a child." Ruchi believes that as a mother, first she has to be open about her feelings on this matter and make sure that she doesn't feel a conflict within herself before telling her children what to do. She further thinks that the children also should be made aware "how it works." In her words –

> "When my children are ready, I will tell them that they will gain something, and lose something if they are with someone who is from a different background or culture. I

> think that I would be comfortable with their choice, but I haven't thought so much about it...at least not right now."

Ruchi's daughter, Deepra, 11, however, sounded pretty sure when she told me that she will marry an Indian and even if she does "get married to an American, [she] will be an Indian."

Parents like Ruchi Puri and Neeta Sahni are confident that their children are not presently involved in the dating business, and that they will be able to "handle the situation when the time comes." These views are in line with what I had expected, and more importantly are in general agreement with what is suggested in the literature on the adaptation patterns of Asian Indians in US (Saran, 1985, Nimbark, 1980). However, a qualitative study such as the present one is worth more if it can reveal a comparatively different set of opinions and beliefs on an issue that is generally considered to generate similar and expected responses by the research participants. In my study, the exception to the rule was often found in the words of Vijaya Raj, a physician and a single mother. When it came to the issue of dating and sex, Vijaya who is the mother of a 16-year-old daughter and a 19-year-old son, had "different and little radical opinions according to the Indian standards in this community."

Vijaya told me that a big worry or concern most Indian parents have, when their children are growing up, is that the children, especially the daughters should not date. In Vijaya's words –

> "If you keep pouring this thing down the throats of your children again and again that they should not think about dating, it does not help. The children will do want they want to do, and they will do it without telling you, behind your back. You have to be open with your kids about such things."

She is aware of the fact that many Indians in the community regard her views on parenting "liberal," and her ways of raising her own children "different." She added -

> "I personally don't care. I have told my children what I think, and I have raised them in a way so that they know their responsibilities and what is right and wrong. I believe I have done my duty and now what they do – it is completely their decision, and their prerogative, and they will face the consequences for that and so will I. But I don't want to make their decision for them, and nor will I say – see I told you so – if something unfortunate happens. And there is no point in keeping your children in a cage, because then they will be rebellious, and they are going to hate their parents,

> and they may go out and do all the things that parents tell them not to do, just as protest. I don't see it is right, and I have seen it happen again and again."

In contrast to the vague responses of the other mothers in the study, Vijaya also had some strong opinions on how she has been able to "handle the issue" of talking to her teenage children about the "facts of life." Her views on this aspect are presented below -

> "Parents should have an open relation with their children and maintain communication. Is my 20-year-old son in an intimate relationship with someone? I don't care if he is and if that is what he wants, but it is my responsibility to tell him that he should be responsible for his actions. I want him to know that responsibilities go along with every choice that he makes. I would ask him that if he impregnates somebody, is he ready to have a child and look after him. Then he should also be aware of other risks that go with it – sexual diseases and what not. Of course, there is the emotional side of it too. I tell my daughter the same thing too. She and I had this long conversation once, and she asked me if I think that there is an appropriate age for having sex. I told her that there is not, but if at 15 or 16 somebody thinks he or she is responsible enough that he or she can take care of a child if that happens, or anything that goes along with the decision to have sex, then probably that is the right age for that person. At 25, if someone is not responsible enough, then even that is not the right age. So they really have to make their own decisions."

I did not ask the responses of parents in Gokul family about the issue of dating, since the children in that family are at present only 8 and 5 years old. As seen by the variety of views presented in this section, there is no single common belief system that Asian Indian parents and children have about the issue of dating and cross-cultural relationships. The only thing that is common in the viewpoints of all the parents and children is that they see these aspects as part of the whole idea of maintaining, preserving, and continuing their cultural and ethnic identities.

Between Two Lands or In a No-Man's Land

Another thing that happens again and again in regard to raising children in a foreign culture is the blending of two cultures leading to a dual cultural experience for immigrants and their children. Vijaya Raj brought an important perspective to this aspect when she said –

> "The sad thing is that we just try to create this mini-India where we don't want our values to change – we just say that we don't do such and such in India and so we should not do it here. People still think that the India that they left when they came here is still the same today. Teenagers in India are doing all sorts of things now. And we Indians here want to preserve and maintain the same old values, unfortunately it

> makes our children absolutely a misfit in that society or this society. That is one disadvantage of raising kids like this – they neither belong here, nor there."

Vijaya added that Indian children who are growing up in US are actually able to maintain two different lives – one for their parents, and one for the dominant society where they want to fit in.

These concepts of living "two different lives" and "fitting in" are thus important aspects of the lives of Asian Indian children in this study. These aspects also pervade the school boundaries and in order to become a perfect fit in both the home and the school culture children from ethnically and culturally diverse families start keeping their two lives separate, which could further increase the distance between the home and the school. During the later part of my study, I had an opportunity to interview Manoj, a graduate student at the university who at the time of the study was temporarily working as a teacher in high school that two of the children in the study were attending. Manoj was born and raised in a southern state in US, and his parents had migrated from India in late 50's. During our conversation, Manoj kept referring to his experiences of growing up as an Asian Indian in the US as being in a "No Man's Land." In his words –

> "It was kind of different, sometimes it feels like you are in a no-man's land. For example, you are not really a part of Indian culture since you are isolated. I grew up in a very small town, and there was not that much Indian population there, so I didn't pick up much Indian culture. Then, I had a taste of American culture at school, but I was still not a part of that because of parental protection. So it feels that I am in some kind of a no-man's land – not a part of this culture, and not really of that culture."

The continuous struggle of alternating between being in a no-man's land and being in two lands became the crux of the schooling experiences of Manoj as he talked more about it –

> "My parents wouldn't let me be a part of many of the activities in high school – like dances and all that – I wouldn't even go to those. It was a cultural thing for my parents, I think – or whatever you might want to call it. They were afraid of the American influence and all that. They were more protective, they thought I might get into some problem there. I don't think that protection is good, because that way parents are socially inhibiting the children and that is not good. Later in life they would feel the deficit, their social skills would not be as developed as that of another normal person. That is not good."

Thus the parents and their cultural beliefs play an important role in shaping these children's experiences at homes and in schools, and also in classifying those experiences to be either in a no-man's land or at a place between two lands.

Communal Living: Interaction, Involvement, and Isolation

Findings of this study suggest that living as a member of a close-knit minority cultural group in a multicultural society has helped Asian Indian children in this study develop and maintain their ethnic and cultural identity. At the same time it has also resulted in ethnic isolation, which can potentially lead to ethnic prejudices by creating a barrier between the two cultures that the children and parents are a part of. Understanding the experiences of the participating Asian Indian families as members of a larger community is the focus of the third important theme used to explore their cultural adaptation patterns.

Creating a Mini-India

According to Vijaya Raj, many Indians want to cling on to their culture because it is more comfortable for them. In her words –

> "Most of the Indians when they move to any place, they want to see if there are other Indians in that area or not. They want to create a mini-India of their own. But I think, and again it is strictly my observation, that there is a certain disadvantage to that. One of the disadvantages is that you are not allowing yourself to flourish, you are not allowing the other value system to come in your life and bring the good and bad that comes with it. The second and the major disadvantage is that you yourself are not allowing others to learn about you and your cultural values."

Vijaya feels that by creating a mini-India of their own, Indians in general have resisted to be a part of the mainstream community, and this, according to her, is often the cause of "ignorance of Americans about our cultural values."

Ruchi Puri expressed a similar concern – "Sometimes people make fun of things because of ignorance." She further shared her observation that most often the usual references to India on TV have something to do with monkeys, elephants, tigers, or snakes. Emphasizing that there is so much more to India than is usually represented in the media, she added – "We have lived in both the places and so we know what it is really like." Rama Gokul believes that at a place like Jeffersonville and many other

communities in US that are not so large, people in general do not interact with different kinds of people. She said - "They see us, but don't know us or don't have any contact. They don't have any idea of where we are from, or what we are, or things like that." The dichotomy between "us" (Indians) and "them" (Americans, generally White Americans) appears as an important aspect of the lives of most Asian Indians in this study.

The tendency to "create a mini-India" of many Asian Indians in the US is reflected in the pattern of the group of people they invite for social get-togethers and parties at their homes. Neeta Sahni explained the trend in her home – "We have separate parties for different groups of people, because one group of people would not know others. We have sometimes parties where we have almost all Indian friends, then we have some parties where we have all others." Her husband, Ravi, talked about his family's social interactions in these words –

> "We have far less social contacts with non-Indians, other than let's say - we may know my child's classmate's parents. That is a very weak social contact - once in a while kind of thing. And then we may know some neighbors too, but most often the close social contact is with my colleagues - on a professional level - whether with Indians or non-Indians. Within Indian community, of course, we go to the social gatherings - like cultural organization's programs and so forth, and we have some Indian neighbors as well. There is more community and friendship feeling among Indians, I think. May be it is just us - meaning our family than most other immigrants, but I shouldn't generalize."

It is not just the Sahni family where this distinction between the family-level and professional-level friendships is visible, it is also true with Puris. Rajan Puri described it as a "very fine line" and added –

> "Of course, the mode of discussion is very different in two settings. Personally it is very difficult to balance it out, but you have to have a balance, that is what I feel. I try my best to maintain this. When I am here at the department, the thinking, discussion, and mixing with people are totally different than when I am at home with Indian friends."

Saran (1985) also suggested that mixing the two social groups of Indian and non-Indian friends is not a common practice in many Asian Indian families. A contradiction to this view was found in Vijaya Raj's opinion who "likes to invite everybody at same time." In her words –"I have always had mixed gatherings, whenever I had any gathering.

I have invited people from both sides." She talked about an "interesting party" that she had a couple of years ago at her home to celebrate the New Year -

> "I invited people from my work, and the people that I know at personal level, outside of my family. It was called the 'Dot Party.' I had put out *kumkum* (red powder used for putting a *bindi* on the forehead), and other *bindis* (*bindi* - a dot put by many Indian women on their foreheads) – of different shades – and everybody who came, got one, whether they liked it or not. It turned out to be such a beautiful party, and since then everybody has asked me when am I going to have another "Dot Party". People from my work and even the men from the Indian community that I had invited got the *bindi* – there was no difference. There were all kinds of people and they all had such a good time. I had cooked some Indian food, and I had also put some American food out. It was so much fun. Ishika and her friends were the in-charge of putting *bindis*."

Vijaya's "Dot Party" is a powerful image in its purpose of bringing Indians into a social and friendly interactive situation with other Indians and non-Indians alike. In a published collection of oral histories of first to fourth generation Americans from different Asian countries, Lee (1991) tells the stories of some Asian Indians in New Jersey who, along with some other Asian Indians in their community had "racial problems with Dotbusters" (p. 113). Dotbusters is a racist group that has been the cause of many instances of racial discrimination and prejudice against Asian Indians, especially in New Jersey and other northeastern states. These groups are called Dotbusters to express their intolerance and hatred against the Dot or the *bindi*, which is one of the most visible symbols of Indian identity, especially for women (Lee). But listening to Vijaya describe her successful "Dot Party," I couldn't help thinking how such a small thing like the *bindi* could be used as a powerful way to bring people together.

While the parents in Puri and Sahni households have often kept their two worlds – Indian and American - separate and distinct from each other, Vijaya Raj has tried to blend the two and provide a richer experience for her children. She described her social circle in these words –

> "I have never been able to create that little world of my own, and just stay within the Indian community, with no contact with the outside community. People that I work with are as good friends as other Indian friends that I have. Actually I think that sometimes that there are more interactions with the people that I know from my work. I am not sure if it is just I, or the kind of work that I do, but I have never maintained a distant relationship with my colleagues. It is almost like being in a family. I have worked with the same group of people for about 12 years now. We

> have seen our children grow together – and each one of us have gone through some rough times in our lives. So there is a lot of bonding there. We share a lot about our children as they are growing up. We have seen our children grow together. I have never made any difference between my professional friends and family friends. And in terms of family friends too, I have never limited myself to just Indians."

Thus the children in this study have different socialization experiences in their families. These experiences shape their perceptions of friendships and associations with Indian and non-Indian peers. This was observed in the different pattern of friendships described by children in Puri and Raj families in a previous section. While Deepra Puri talked about a feeling of comfort and security that she has with her Indian friends, Ishika Raj and I had our first interview in the presence of a close non-Indian friend of Ishika, who had come from the school to spend the day at Ishika's house.

"Cocoon Mentality"

Lack of involvement of Asian Indians in the mainstream community comes out as another reason for the overall general ignorance in Jeffersonville about Indian culture. Rama Gokul believes that Asian Indians in town should reflect upon how much they contribute toward the community at large if they want to make a visible impact on the culture of society. She made it very clear in her comment that by "community" she means not just the Indian community, but the larger community in town. She added –

> "I don't think Indians see any need for getting involved in the community – for them things are just fine the way they are. They know that their daily life is going fine, and they are happy with it. I don't think they look at the larger picture. We Indians do not show our presence in the community, we do not attend school board meetings, town meetings, or other events, which are important for community. There are some groups of Indians, especially women who do not even feel the necessity of learning English, because they don't need to interact with anybody who is not Indian, they are so much involved in their own little social circle."

Rama's husband, Harish, who identifies himself as the "first-generation of Indians in America" was involved with NAACP activities in the town where the family lived before moving to Jeffersonville, and wants to get involved in some similar activities in this community too. He said –

> "We should realize that because we have decided to become citizens of this society, it is kind of our responsibility to get more involved. But we are only concerned with Indian community basically…it is sort of a cocoon mentality actually. We put a shell on ourselves, once in a while we come out of the shell and we may do something."

Harish explained the "cocoon mentality" of Asian Indians and provided a reason for the lack of their active involvement in the larger community –

> "Basically we are very concerned or focused with our needs, and our future needs. There is a much larger meaning to the whole thing as being in a society, in a country – these aspects are very hard to come for in families if they don't think they belong here. Most of the Indians in US always feel that though they live here, and make money and everything, their heart is always in India. That is something that can never change, at least in the first generation. They can never get out of this shell. It is not easy for us to do that... But the thing is that when earlier immigrants came, they did not have any choice, because they did not have a home to go back to. They left everything they had behind and came here to settle. They had this concept that it is either America or nowhere. But we Indians don't feel that way, we are always Indians by heart. Since we have been maintaining this dual nature, I think that may be the part of the reason why we don't take as active role as we should or could."

Separate but Equal

Relations between different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups become an important aspect of living in a multicultural society such as the US. This issue also appeared in different forms in some of the conversations with my research participants over the course of the study. Keeping in mind the sensitive nature of issues related to relationships between different ethnic and cultural groups, I decided to include only those excerpts from my interviews which reveal the parents' beliefs about the role of these issues in their children's education.

Rama Gokul, the high-school teacher, said that most of the Asian Indian families think that racial issues do not directly affect their lives. She added that since children are growing up in an environment where all these issues are rampant, Asian Indian parents couldn't afford to remain indifferent to these concerns. Rama believes that many Asian Indians don't want to communicate their feelings about the issues of ethnic prejudices in the community, and they even choose to ignore its existence. Many Asian Indians feel that they are not affected by racial/ethnic concerns because they are educated and intelligent, but the truth, according to Rama, is that they can be as easily victims of prejudice or discrimination as other minority groups.

Rama, who was born and raised in the US and who identifies herself as an "American of Indian background," also talked about her experiences of growing up Indian in US –

> "I grew up actually visualizing that I am not different than anybody else. I grew up with all Americans around me. It was pretty much a single-race town, and I never felt myself as being much different. There were some minor incidents. In late 60's when a lot of the civil rights stuff was going on, some of the kids hassled me, called me names. It wasn't because I was an Indian; it was just because I was of a different color. I was in the third grade or fourth grade, and I never thought about it much."

The big realization for Rama came when she moved to the Midwest with her husband. She shared with me an incident from her student-teaching days –

> "I was assigned to a school that was just outside of the town that we lived in, before moving to Jeffersonville. I went there, and I met the teacher – who is now really a good friend of mine – we talked for about an hour or so, and then she said that the principal is concerned that none of the children would understand me. It was not because I had an accent, but because I was an Indian."

Rama also talked about one of her recent experiences as an Asian Indian high school teacher. Last year one of the remarks on her evaluation sheet said -'And her [Rama's] English is very good.' Rama found it strange that somebody considered it important to mention her English skills in her evaluation just because she is not a "typical American teacher." She said – "I felt bad, even though it is a positive remark. I was born and brought up in America, so why should my English be not good?" Rama believes that in spite of being a university town, there is not enough awareness in Jeffersonville about different cultures and people from different countries, though "it is still better than many other small towns."

Vijaya Raj, a physician in Jeffersonville, talked about her some of her experiences where patients have told her "on the face" that they don't want her to treat them or their family members. She added that some other foreign doctors have also often experienced similar things. In her words -

> "The hatred or prejudice that some people have against other groups is mainly because of the ignorance. I feel that there is lot of ignorance around among Americans, especially in the Midwest about Indians or Indian culture, and many other cultures. I mean, if you are a foreigner to them, whether you are from Algeria, Egypt, or India, or Iran, whatever country, you are a foreigner. It does not matter,

they don't want to stop and take time to visualize which part of the world you are from. To them a foreigner is a foreigner."

Harish Gokul, who works in corporate America, believes in strong interactions between education level, economic level and ethnic discrimination. In his words –

"It is a power game kind of situation – power comes from education or the position where you are at corporation structure. That defines actually what you have to face because at this level that I am, people don't even think about calling names or saying any sort of prejudicial remark. But when we are on a low level job, or if we further go down the class level – and the class levels are very well defined here – at those levels you'll find more prejudice, and it exists very visibly, and it comes out very strongly in the society."

Harish used a "market" analogy to provide an explanation for ethnic prejudices –"When there is a competition for the same resource by different people, you always find that minority groups have to face prejudice." He is also sure that his children will have to face "such things" as they grow up, and he thinks that it is the responsibility of parents to prepare their children for this and make them understand that this is "more of a dark side of human beings." He strongly believes that education helps people in elevating their own strength and self-confidence, and consequently enables them to fight any prejudice or discrimination. He considers it his most important parenting job to instill this value in his children.

Ravi Sahni, a senior professor at the university, explained the reasons for "not really" experiencing any prejudice or discrimination because of his ethnic background in these words –

"I think there are two reasons why Indians never experienced any such thing. First, we are not a sizable or visible minority. And secondly, almost all the initial immigrants from India were professionals. That is not true of all the current immigrants, but in 1950s or 60s, almost all the people who came from India were professionals. So the only experience the local American population had with Indians were with those who were doctors or engineers. And the number was so small, that it did not really matter. There was also no political force of any kind. Now, of course things have changed. Indians in New Jersey, I am sure have experienced such things… It is again because of the professional level you are at."

Another professor at the university, Rajan Puri, shares some of Ravi Sahni's views and believes that his hard work, educational achievement, and professional success

have been the reasons why he has never experienced any kind of direct ethnic discrimination. He told me that he has "gotten what [he] deserved" but that is not true for some of his acquaintances who have had some taste of institutional "politics" because of their ethnic backgrounds. Rajan believes that his children and that of other immigrants must work extra hard than "non-foreigners," to secure their academic and professional futures in face of direct and often indirect ethnic discrimination that prevails in the larger society.

Emphasizing the common desire of everyone to preserve cultural identity, Ruchi Puri considered the issue of ethnic prejudice as just a part of the inherent ethnic and cultural differences among people living in a multicultural society. In her words –

> "What may be normal thing for an American may not be normal for me, and what is normal for me may seem strange or even abnormal to an American. So you can't say that one is right and other is wrong... people have different experiences growing up, and they try to cling to those values to some extent."

Implications for Schools and Families

In her research with Punjabi Sikhs (groups of Asian Indians who migrated from Punjab, a north-western state in India) in rural California, Gibson (1988) characterized the strategy for cultural adaptation of these families as "accommodation without assimilation." She used this theme to explain the patterns of selective Americanization of Asian Indians in which they rejected the notion of giving up their separate cultural identity while making efforts to conform publicly to the requirements of the larger society in order to avoid or reduce conflict between themselves and other groups. This notion of "accommodation without assimilation" helps to understand the ways in which most parents and children in this study dealt with their Indian and American identities. Parents generally liked to identify themselves as Indians, though they were fully aware of the emergence of bi-cultural identities in their children and how that influenced various aspects of their lives.

The differences in the extent to and the nature in which parents and children in this study have accommodated, adapted, or assimilated in the dominant culture are worth the attention of educators, researchers, and policy-makers. The diversity in cultural adaptation patterns of Asian Indians in this study is an important finding, which

challenges educators' stereotypes of Asian Indian students, and demonstrates that each family is unique in its social and cultural adaptation to the dominant society. In other words, "some are more Indian than others." Parents in one of the families in this study were more keen than others to make sure that their children learned their religious customs and cultural traditions, though most agreed that providing exposure to their culture at home was important in helping children get in touch with their Indian selves. A difference was also observed in the opinions and efforts of parents in regard to maintaining and learning the native language. Although teaching the native language was one of the most important responsibilities for parents in one of the four families, the father in another of the families did not feel that it was important for his children to know their native language.

The cultural crossroads that children and parents in my study find themselves at, though unique to these families, are also similar in essence to the ones explored in some of the other research done with other minority ethnic, racial, and cultural groups (Commins, 1992; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Lee, 1991; Ogbu, 1991; & Suarez-Orozco, 1991). While most Asian Indian children are trying to "fit in" both of the cultures that they are associated with, an important aspect of their experiences is the discontinuity they encounter when they leave their home to enter a school where there are very few opportunities for them to express their cultural and ethnic identity. As I found in the larger study, these parents also had diverse views on their expectations of schools with respect to cultural maintenance and native language support. While some of the parents expected schools to provide support and encouragement for children from diverse cultural backgrounds for maintaining their native languages and cultures; others did not see it as a responsibility of the schools. According to some parents in this latter group, schools should only emphasize skills that children need to master for their academic and professional success.

Some parents in this study implied in their comments that teachers and principals need to understand the beliefs and value systems of people like them who are relatively newer immigrants to the US. This understanding could help school personnel modify their opinions and judgments about the academic ability and achievement levels of Asian Indian children without stereotyping. The findings of this study, however, suggest that

even within one ethnic group, each family has its unique historical, social, and cultural set of beliefs and experiences that influence the schooling experiences of the children in that family. In their attempt to classify and categorize children and families in groups based on their ethnicity, language, race, or religion educators, researchers, and policy makers often ignore these particularities.

The "cocoon mentality" that one parent in the study referred to could and does result in insufficiency of active participation of Asian Indian parents in their children's schools. While most parents consider it important to preserve and maintain their cultural and ethnic identity, it does not, however, need to be done within the confines of a "mini-India" which often closes its doors to the outside larger community. Parents in this study frequently commented about the lack of awareness of most Americans about Asian Indians and India. Though societal institutions such as schools can be effective instruments in creating general awareness about various sub-cultures in the community, people in the Asian Indian community also need to make efforts in bridging the information gap between two cultures that they belong to as a result of their immigrant experience. That would require interactions on a social level and participation in the mainstream community events and programs. These interactions can provide a means for people in the mainstream community to know, understand, and even experience some of the cultural traditions, rituals, and belief systems of Asian Indians.

Cultural inhibitions on part of Asian Indian parents as members of an ethnic minority group could partly account for lack of their involvement in schools. These parents' personal experiences with schools in India could be another reason. Most of the schools in India – public or private – don't provide enough opportunity to parents to get involved in school matters on an organized level like PTA. Although parent-teacher conferences are a regular feature in many schools in India, there isn't much involvement of parents in other activities in schools. As a result, parents coming from such a background may not feel comfortable in being an active partner in dealing with school issues such as discussing school rules and disciplinary policies at PTA meetings. Involvement in the PTA could also be sometimes construed as some form of political advocacy, which many Asian Indian immigrants don't want to be associated with. All this creates a need for teachers and principals to understand the cultural beliefs and

experiences of parents from diverse backgrounds in order to make them feel comfortable in participating in their children's schools on a more productive level.

Schools need to take an initiative in productively utilizing and channeling the educational and professional expertise of their parents. As seen in this study, the education level of many Asian Indian parents enables them to contribute in schools in many other ways besides being a representative of their ethnic and cultural group and making their cultural identity visible in school.

To facilitate involvement of culturally diverse parents in their children's education, it is important for teachers and school administrators to identify and comprehend the particularities in parents' cultural models of schooling. As organizations, most schools however, are not structured to respond to the cultural needs of individual students and families. Instead, there is a tendency on the part of teachers and administrators to look for patterns and commonalties that may help them in understanding their families better and also in addressing their concerns. A challenge for educators, thus, is to continuously attempt to understand the families in their diversity and complexity, while looking for some common threads in the beliefs and experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds that influence the experiences and performance of their children in schools. A bigger challenge is to avoid creating additional stereotypes in this pursuit. The words of a teacher at the high school involved in this study sum up the essence and the most important insight derived from this research –

> "What makes a story rich are the incidentals, the scenarios, the characters and their beliefs. And ultimately what the diversity of details shows is the ultimate universality of human beings. You can have a story set in Russia, or in Puritan America, or in India. You appreciate the details of the diverse settings, but what you really get at is the universal human behavior or nature that we all share, no matter what the cultural incidentals are."

Although this study was about understanding the cultural incidentals that mark the lives and schooling experiences of children in four Asian Indian families, the findings also suggest some common patterns that these families share with one another. The place of education in the lives of all these families, their theories of success as immigrants, their level of expectations of their children, and their common desire to do "whatever it

takes" to provide the best possible education to their children are some common threads in the cultural models of schooling in these families. All the children find themselves at a cultural crossroad of growing up Indian in America, though the extent may vary among families. This study with Asian Indian families adds to the growing database of contextualized research with culturally and linguistically diverse families in the U.S. The continuing challenge for everyone concerned with education of children in the present-day American society is to understand children and families in their diversity and complexity, and this study has been one such endeavor. As one principal remarked at the end of an interview –

> "In my interactions with Asian parents, I probably don't distinguish between Indian or other Asian parents. What you have done through this conversation is heighten my awareness. That is really good, because I feel like I have learned something about my Indian students and parents."

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